

Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity gives Gilpin “housing hero” award for mobile home program

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On November 15, Shaun Gilpin of the Mobile Home Program at CVOEO graciously accepted a Housing Hero Award at the biennial Statewide Housing Conference, a gathering of stakeholders in the housing sector throughout the state. The award was granted for the support the Program provided to mobile home residents in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene and beyond. While Irene may be out of the minds of many as an event long past, that is certainly not the case for many of the storm's victims in Vermont and the Mobile Home Program continues to work to this day with survivors of the storm to get back on their feet and get their lives back to normalcy after the immense loss that they suffered.

Prior to the storm, CVOEO's Mobile Home Program worked with residents of mobile homes throughout the state, a housing type that makes up nearly seven percent of all housing units in Vermont, to ensure an ability to increase quality of life in numerous ways. As part of this mission, the Program began work with long-standing partners at the University of Vermont to embark on a multi-year research project funded by the US Department of Agriculture. This project focused on assessing the 248 mobile home parks in the state and their risk to disasters along with potential for building disaster resiliency.

More importantly, the project began nearly 18 months before Irene devastated 16 mobile home parks in our state. Because of pre-established partnerships and a deep desire to help some of our most vulnerable communities, the Mobile Home Program was able to step up its functions to assist with the Irene recovery effort. Roles included advising and assisting the Long Term Disaster Recovery Group as well as working with the Vermont Community Foundation and the Lieutenant Governor's Office and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to establish a fund and implement a plan to remove destroyed mobile homes at no cost to residents.

Hundreds of mobile homes were destroyed by the storm, leaving many low-income mobile home owners with the task of salvaging what belongings they could and the responsibility to remove destroyed homes from parks at a cost of anywhere from \$3,000 to \$9,000 per home. For many individuals, this cost would consume their entire FEMA assistance. In light of this the Mobile Home Program worked with partners across the state to create a program to use privately raised funds to remove these destroyed homes at no cost to home owners, allowing the homeowners and park owners to recover more quickly from this disaster. The Program staff also worked with the Governor's office to encourage the filing of condemnation letters for destroyed mobile homes, bringing

over \$500,000 worth of additional FEMA Individual Assistance funds into the state and into the hands of storm victims to rebuild their lives.

Throughout this all, the Mobile Home Program continues to work on establishing the appropriate infrastructure and lines of communication to better react to any future event and to move Vermont into a new era of disaster resiliency for the most vulnerable of Vermonters.

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